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The Role of NGOs in Peacebuilding in the Pastoralist and Agro-Pastoralist Communities of Nyangatom, Hammer, and Dassanech Community of South Omo, Ethiopia

Asmare Shetahun Alemneh
Department of Political Science and International Relation, College of Social Science and Humanities, Arba Minch University, Ethiopia.
Email: asmare.shetahun@amu.edu.et, asmareshitahun@gmail.com
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0005-4405-9236

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Abstract
The South Omo zone of Ethiopia is conflict-ridden, and efforts are being made to build peace. This paper indicated that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a great role in peacebuilding and in encouraging grassroots peacebuilding initiatives. This study examines the role of NGOs in promoting peacebuilding among Hammer, Dassanech, and Nyangatom communities in the South Omo zone using a case study research design to get the experience and beliefs of non-governmental organizations that engaged in peacebuilding activities to reduce destructive or violent conflicts in the study area. The conflict affected the communities' harmonious relationships and traumatized the residents. NGOs have contributed to peacebuilding activities such as promoting conflict resolution and psycho-social healing through peace education and by participating in conflict reduction programs. The study recommended, NGOs come up with conflict intervention mechanisms for peacebuilding, such as participating in economic empowerment and livelihood diversification programmes. In addition, the government peace apparatus should work with non-governmental organizations at the local level to take action on the spoilers of peace.

Keywords
Peacebuilding; Conflict; Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs); Pastoralism; Agro-Pastoralism; Pastureland

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1. Introduction

Local and international NGOs or civil society organizations are a pervasive feature of contemporary peacebuilding. They continue to play important roles in protecting people from violence, providing services, monitoring human rights abuses, and advocating for an end to wars or authoritarian rule. In addition, they are a mirror of the encompassing society, supporting peace in

some cases, obstructing peace processes by preaching hate and polarizing adversary groups in conflict situations (Paffenholz and Reychler, 2015). Conflict is a situation in which two or more individuals, groups, and communities are in conscious opposition to each other, pursuing incompatible goals or interests. The conflict may be tribal, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, socio-economic, or political. It also includes the struggle over values and claims about scarce resources, power, and status (Coser, 1956). Hence, these types of conflicts need peace-building to reduce their destructive effects and to sustain peace in the community.

Peacebuilding is the process of achieving peace in conflict situations and the promotion of a culture of peace. It aims to achieve positive peace, addresses the underlying causes of conflict, and prevents its transformation into violence. Furthermore, peacebuilding includes conflict, preventive actions, management, and resolution mechanisms that aim to reach long-term, sustainable peace. It focuses on rebuilding the social capital and trust within society, as well as helping all members of society live peaceful way (Paffenholz, 2010). Mohammed and Yalwa (2018) also stated that, peace building is the process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the reoccurrence of conflict by addressing the root causes and effect of conflict through reconciliation, institution building and politics as well as economic transformation (Mohammed and Yalwa, 2018).

Peace and conflict scholars extend the concept of NGOs as a significant component of peacebuilding in conflict-ridden areas. According to Jeong (2005), international and local NGOs play an important role in conflict transformation and peacebuilding because they look at the root causes of the problem. It involves an analysis of structural factors that are the source of a conflict. Failure of such initiatives results in the recurrence of conflicts and the absence of a durable peace. In addition, Galtung (1998), who is the founder of peace and conflict studies, wrote that the role of NGOs in peacebuilding at the grassroots level is essential. Understanding the participation of NGOs in conflict management, transformation, social reconstruction, rehabilitation, peace building, and reconciliation is part of the indispensable elements that make any peace process sustainable. Galtung (1998) also added that peacebuilding is contextual. Kiplagat (2018) explained that, in Africa, NGOs focus on long, durable peace through transformational efforts, especially in African countries where conflicts result from poor governance, plenty or scarcity of resources, and disputes manifested through negative ethnicity.

In Ethiopia, different aid and development NGOs have made important changes to their goals to work on the issue of conflict in society. In addition to the relief and rehabilitation activities, these NGOs have been encouraging local communities to participate in peacebuilding, and they work to promote a culture of peace (Rahmato et al., 2008). In the South Omo zone, NGOs are working in peacebuilding. For example, a USAID-funded project is working on strengthening institutions for peace and development; the traditional structures of elders strengthened by the Ethiopian Pastoralist Research and Development Association (EPaRDA) are now leading actors in mediating inter-ethnic conflicts. An NGO known as Pact Ethiopia, under a project called Stability for Ethiopia Lowland Marginalized Communities (SELAM-C), employed a participatory, bottom-up approach and built on traditional pastoral conflict mediation and prevention mechanisms and practices to foster peace more effectively in the community (EUTF, 2016; Mengistu, 2014).

In the South Omo zone, 24 NGOs are recorded as actively working at the start of the 2016/17 fiscal year and work on peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and resolution by strengthening peace institutions at the Woreda and kebele levels (EUTF, 2016). As the study area is conflict-prone, NGOs have continued to play a substantial role in the peacebuilding process between and among the pastoral and agro-pastoral communities. Though conflict is a common phenomenon in the study area, it has frequently been observed and has resulted in instability, loss of life, and property

destruction. In these circumstances, to attain lasting peace, NGOs take part in the peacebuilding process and contribute their parts. Thus, the main purpose of this proposal is to investigate the role and challenges of NGOs in the study area.

Conflict is an inevitable phenomenon in a human's entire life and has a complex cause (Burton, 1990, p. 13). Conflicts in the pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities of Ethiopia are primarily caused by economic marginalization, economic inequality, and deterioration of their livelihoods rather than by ethnic diversity (Pavanello, 2009). NGOs play an important role in the peacebuilding process of conflict-affected areas in Ethiopia, and they can bring sustainable peace to the community through conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and transformation at the grassroots level (Mengistu, 2014). As Mohammud (2005, p. 17) indicated, "NGOs can directly or indirectly contribute to the settlements of the conflicts and long-term peace-building process" in Ethiopia. They can contribute in support of conflict-sensitive development intervention that aims to address the factors that cause conflicts. They can also support local government administrations that lack the capacity and skills to manage, resolve, and transform conflicts.

NGOs have the potential to understand the cause and sources of conflict, and they can find solutions for it in collaboration with the community and the government to minimize the negative effects of conflict on the social and economic life of the community of the South Omo zone (EUTF, 2016). In addition, EPaRDA (2001-2007) revealed that peacebuilding activities over the last decades have demonstrated that it is possible to significantly reduce incidents of violent conflict between the different ethnic groups in the south Omo zone pastoral and agro-pastoral communities. Most of the previous studies focus on the cross-border conflicts, inter-ethnic conflicts in the south Omo zone community. Gebre (2011) analyzes the dynamics of pastoral conflict and how the conflict affects the peace of the community. EPaRDA (2001-2007) discusses conflict mitigation, which deals with conflict in the community, its impact, and management mechanisms. Teshome (2010) covers cross-border pastoral conflict, its causes, and conflicts arising from shared resources in other areas. However, the roles of local and international NGOs in peacebuilding activities, which include conflict resolution, management, and transformation, are not assessed. In addition, the challenges NGOs face in peace-building are not evaluated. Furthermore, the activities of NGOs to promote peace in the study area and the approaches of NGOs working in peace-building have not been comprehensively studied. Therefore, this research proposes to fill the identified gap in the study area by taking Dassanech and Nyangatom, Woredas of South Omo zone, as a case study.

2. Research Methods

This research employed a qualitative approach that allows for an in-depth investigation of the role of NGOs in peacebuilding. Qualitative methods can be based on an interpretative research paradigm that assumes social reality to be dynamic, constructed, and evolving (Marsh and Stoker, 2002) and primarily seek explanation of causes from individual cases (Mahoney and Goertz, 2006). From the interpretive perspective, qualitative research aims to investigate the role of NGOs in peacebuilding. The researcher used a case study research design and collected data through FGD, interviews, non-participatory observation, and documents. A case study design is used in the study to obtain comprehensive and in-depth information (Kothari, 2004) argues that the case study aims to understand the case in-depth, and in its natural setting, recognizing its complexity and its context. Therefore, a case study was employed to get in-depth information on the role of NGOs in peacebuilding in the study area. The purposive sampling method was used to recruit participants who have experience and knowledge about the research problem. The participants were community members, local administrators, conflict prevention and early warning workers, zonal peace and militia leaders, and NGOs. To analyze the qualitative data, the researcher performs data

reduction, coding of words, texts, and verifies data. Finally, the data is displayed for reporting. The researcher used the content analysis method to analyze the collected data. A content analysis of the components of verbal discussions held with respondents is carried out. The recorded dialogue data are arranged into units of information and themes for analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Main Causes of Conflict in the Study Area

Main cause of the conflicts identified in the study area include:

- Competition over resources like pasture and water to use;
- Cultural factors, e.g., Animal raiding for dowry;
- Drought;
- Revenge;
- Increased and uncontrolled use of illicit firearms;
- Inter-ethnic land claims; and
- Conflict over access to fishing rights.

3.2. Activities of NGOs in the study Area

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are attempting to promote greater resource sharing to reduce conflict. International organizations have supported various peace efforts such as trainings, forums, peace clubs, peace radios, and peace committees, as noted by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (2015). In the study area, except for peace committees and trainings, others are nonexistent (Interview with Woreda Conflict Prevention and Early Response Office, 2023). Non-governmental organizations like FBOs, Riam Riam Peace Network, IOM, Mercy Corps, Oxfam GB, EpaRDA, and SAPCONE that commit to the communities' peace, help in the dissemination of information, provide training, and participate in reconciliations (European Commission, 2016). They provide education in the form of training to develop a culture of peace in the community (FGD 4). Based on the theory of culture of peace, the conflicting parties create an attitude of nonviolence and fierce determination to defend human rights, justice, and human dignity, and the existence of peace in a community is expected from all members of the community. Peace will be a permanent feature of all social institutions, especially the economy and the political scene (Leedy, 2001).

In pre- and post-conflict contexts, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society or NGOs' engagement in peace and peace-related activities are the important drivers for peacebuilding (Lederach, 1997). The NGOs play an important role in advocacy to help the Woreda or districts to ensure peace and reduce conflict. NGOs are at the cutting edge of people-centered structural peacebuilding diplomacy practices between the two communities. In Ethiopia, international organizations and national Civil Society Organizations have had a crucial role in establishing local peace committees. CSOs have roles in supporting the continuity of peace dialogues between conflicting parties. They provide the skill of peacebuilding to leaders to enhance community-based peacebuilding (Interview with zonal and Woreda Peace, Conflict Prevention and Early Response Office of Nyangatom, Hammer and Dassanech, 2023).

There are many NGOs engaged in various activities. Specifically, 44 NGOs are working on cross-border issues. The 24 NGOs are on the Ethiopian side and 20 on the Kenyan side (European Commission, 2016). Within Ethiopia, most of their activities are focused on livelihoods and resilience, which include interventions such as rangeland management, agriculture, and water. It indirectly contributes to peace and stability in society. Projects dealing directly with conflict and instability are less common, perhaps

as a result of the Charities and Societies Proclamation (No.621/2009), which has severely restricted NGO activities in these thematic areas.

On the Kenya side, international donors and the Government of Kenya are collaborating on several large-scale projects designed to strengthen and diversify livelihoods, promote resilience, and develop local markets, which indirectly contribute to conflict prevention, management, and peacebuilding in general (Interview with the South Omo Zone Peace and Militia Office, 2022). NGOs provide peace education activities to help community leaders and the youth groups understand the cause of conflicts and develop conflict problem-solving skills to bring about behaviour change and prevent conflict and violence, funding for poverty reduction, resource governance, advocating the right to peace and creating awareness on conflict prevention to mitigate internal and cross-border conflicts.

3.2. Challenges of Peacebuilding in the Study Area

Peacebuilding in the study area continues to face major challenges in the current government of Ethiopia. Some of the challenges in the study area are stated below:

- The governments of Ethiopia have not come up with an appropriate strategy to eliminate the causes of conflicts.
- Reluctance of leaders, especially politicians, to work for conflict prevention.
- Misinformation to take Preventive Measures and a lack of strong communication among leaders.
- Lack of taking proactive initiative to mitigate conflicts.
- The culture of the community: Individual behavior is shaped by community culture. In almost all ethnic groups, heroism and a culture of killing an enemy are highly praised and blessed. Those who are killed are decorated on their chest based on the tradition of the community.
- The absence of functional government peace apparatus at the local level: The government peace apparatus is not working in all of the rural areas, and its services are limited around the kebeles, which are near the Woreda or districts. According to the informants, the kebeles that are far from the center of the district do not receive the full security services of the government, and because of this, they are exposed to insecurity.

3.3. The Opportunities of Peacebuilding in the Study Area

There are opportunities for peacebuilding in the study area. The following are the identified opportunities based on the collected data:

- The formal and informal education is also seen as an opportunity to contribute to the erosion of interest in conflict among pastoralists, especially among the youth. There is a slight change in behavior among the youth pastoralist community. Through time, people develop a culture of peace because of the influence of education.
- Diversification of livelihoods in addition to pastoralism in some areas of the study area is observed to reduce conflict over pasture and water. Engaging in rain-fed agriculture and using irrigation for crop production is the best opportunity to change the conflict situation in the study area.
- The existence of peace and militia offices for the promotion of peace and security in the conflict-ridden areas is another opportunity for peacebuilding. The local and zonal offices are working together with the conflict early warning and response offices to prevent conflicts.
- The political development of self-administration is also a good opportunity to govern them in a way that they participate in the decisions and policy policy-making process of the government related to the peacebuilding strategy of the state.

- Strengthening the indigenous system of conflict resolution in each ethnic group of the study area community plays a significant role in the peacebuilding practices, even if it never makes a lasting solution to peace. It creates a pathway for peacebuilding intervention.
- The last but not the least opportunity identified by the researcher is the indirect conflict intervention made by Governmental, NGOs, and intergovernmental organizations. They contribute a lot to education and development, which directly and indirectly creates a peaceful way of life in the community.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study established that NGOs actively engaged in promoting peacebuilding activities by offering peace education, promoting peacebuilding, advocating for the right to peace, participating in conflict reduction programs, and identifying the sources of conflicts. The conflict in the community has not been reduced, and creative peace initiatives are needed. The mechanisms of positive peace or creating social justice have not been tried based on the context of the conflict in the area. The challenges of peacebuilding and the sources of conflict in the area are the culture of the community and the absence of a government peace apparatus in local areas. The study recommended, NGOs come up with conflict intervention mechanisms for peacebuilding, such as participating in economic empowerment and livelihood diversification programmes. In addition, the government peace apparatus should work with non-governmental organizations at the local levels to take action on the spoilers of peace or the causes of conflicts.

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Author's Declarations and Essential Ethical Compliances

Authors' Contributions (in accordance with ICMJE criteria for authorship)
This article is 100% contributed by the sole author. He conceived and designed the research or analysis, collected the data, contributed to data analysis & interpretation, wrote the article, performed critical revision of the article/paper, edited the article, and supervised and administered the field work.

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Research involving human bodies or organs or tissues (Helsinki Declaration)
The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved any human subject (body or organs) for experimentation. It was not a clinical research. The contexts of human population/participation were only indirectly covered through literature review. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) or ethical obligation of Helsinki Declaration does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

Research involving animals (ARRIVE Checklist)
The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved any animal subject (body or organs) for experimentation. The research was not based on laboratory experiment involving any kind animal. The contexts of animals were only indirectly covered through literature review. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) or ethical obligation of ARRIVE does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

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The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved Indigenous Peoples as participants or respondents. The contexts of Indigenous Peoples or Indigenous Knowledge were only indirectly covered through literature review. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) or prior informed consent (PIC) of the respondents or Self-Declaration in this regard does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

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The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved the plants for experiment and field studies. Some contexts of plants are also indirectly covered through literature review. Thus, during this research the author(s) obeyed the principles of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on the Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

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The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not directly involved any local community participants or respondents belonging to non-Indigenous peoples. Neither this study involved any child in any form directly. The contexts of different humans, people, populations, men/women/children and ethnic people were only indirectly covered through literature review. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) or prior informed consent (PIC) of the respondents or Self-Declaration in this regard does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses)
The author(s) has/have NOT complied with PRISMA standards. It is not relevant in case of this study or written work.

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